

4316

A
S E R M O N,
ON THE PROPRIETY
OF
Attending Public Worship,
AND
AN ATTENTIVE SERIOUS CONDUCT,
IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.

BY John Eliot, *R*
Minister of the New North Church.



PRINTED BY JOHN RUSSELL,
1800.

14 +



A SERMON.

PROVERBS viii. 31.

BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT HEARETH ME WATCHING
DAILY AT MY GATES, WAITING AT THE POSTS OF MY
DOORS.

IT has ever been my desire to bring men to a sense of religion ; and to free them from all kind of superstition. A discouragement attends the right discharge of ministerial duties, from seeing many professors quite superstitious in certain parts of the external service ; and other persons so liberal in their views of the christian dispensation, as to neglect divine ordinances, and all public worship, lest they should be accused of spiritual pride, or the devotion of the Pharisees. The pleasures of religion are sublime and rational, and they who worship God in the beauties of holiness must enjoy them ; for they taste and see that the Lord is good, and rejoice in that divine rest which is afforded to their souls. Can any of you be displeased with services that tend so much to preserve the dignity of your minds, and increase the blessedness of the temper ? With your own rational sentiments of the Divinity, and of the religion which is professed in

the places where you dwell, can you help exercising the best affections? Do you not feel that benevolence expands the glow of your zeal, and is it not a spark of the seraph's fire that burns in your breast, when you muse upon divine things, and rise upon the wings of love to the heavenly mansions. "To thee, O God, do I lift up my soul. I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will come into the house in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear I will worship towards thy holy temple."

It is our fault, my hearers, if we are not made *wise unto salvation*, by the instructions we have received; every moral lesson in the sacred volume is a ray from the father of lights, and given for our benefit, that we may improve in knowledge and virtue; and it is a truth clearly manifested that, as we are enlightened *by the spirit of wisdom and revelation*, we obtain knowledge of human nature and become acquainted with God. Do any perish in their sins, it is their own fault; for all men are put into a salvable state. The means of grace imply a capacity for improvement in every moral excellence—why then do you not listen to the calls and invitations, the admonitions and instructions of those who speak to you as they spoke to former generations, in the song of wisdom and with the voice of love! "Now, therefore, O ye children, hearken unto me, for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise and refuse-it not. Blessed is the man that heareth

me watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoſo findeth me findeth life, and ſhall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that ſinneth againſt me wrongeth his own ſoul. All they that hate me, love death.”

We cannot dwell upon all the means of inſtruction that are profitable; nor diſcourſe at large upon that ſtudy, meditation, reading, and prayer which ſtrengthen the chriſtian graces, and are of great uſe in preparing men’s minds for converſion, by which I mean a habit of goodneſs—that transformation of the ſoul which makes men, to uſe the evangelical ſtyle, *partakers of the divine nature*. When the heart is ſuitably impreſſed, the life is adorned with good actions—and there is not only a conſiſtency, but an engaging luſtre and beauty in the whole deportment.

My deſign, in the preſent diſcourſe, is to perſuade you to *join the aſſembly* of thoſe *who worſhip on the Lord’s day*; and to behave like chriſtians during the ſervice, that your fellow worſhippers, or a ſtranger in coming in, may think you enjoyed the reality while you put on the form of religion.

Under the firſt head—They who make a practice of attending public worſhip, will hardly ſuppoſe the reproof adminiſtered to them, yet may receive ſome pleaſure from having their ſentiments confirmed, or their conduct

approved. Ye, who in this manner wait at Wisdom's door are in the way of obtaining the influences of the divine spirit, to build you up in the faith of the gospel—ye shall find life if you receive instruction into good and honest hearts.

There are others to whom we are bound to speak, who neglect publick worship, are careless and indifferent, as though they neither regarded the things done in heaven or upon earth. You do not wait at the Posts of Wisdom's door, or catch even the fragrance of the incense which ascends to the skies; for what are the divine altars to you? Now and then you step into the temple, to accompany a friend, or gratify your curiosity, which may be the case this day.—May a word in season be spoken to you—I beseech you by the mercies of God, to hear instruction and be *wise*.

But to you, more especially, is our subject applicable, who absent yourselves upon every trifling occasion, as though you did not *love* the Courts of the Lord. You do not consider the nature and importance of the duty, or that it is a duty you owe to God, to *regard* his *ordinances*, to worship in public as well as in private. May you feel how much you are interested in this important concern. Several excuses are made by persons of this character which shall be mentioned; that by showing their futility we may excite an attention to what is

said in favour of observing the *Christian Sabbath*.

Some apologies are too trifling to need a serious discussion. Such as are raised against the clergy may be, or may not be worthy of notice—let them bear and forbear, if they can only serve the cause of their Master, or gain respect to his institutions. Let them be “honest in their conversation, and then shall they be ashamed who speak evil of them.”

When people object to our mode of preaching, let us advise with ourselves whether we have taken sufficient pains to make our discourses edifying; and while we modestly do this, let the people consider whether the fault be not in some measure their own, that they are no more profited by the word.

The reasons given by persons who neglect public worship, and are thought sufficient excuses for their conduct, are such as these.

They see others who have been very constant in their attendance, and have been thought very good on that account, no better than men who have made no professions of Religion.

That they themselves were once in the habit of attending, but got no good by it.

And that they can employ their time better at home.

First—Is it the case that they who go to Church constantly are no better than their neighbours who stay at home? Give them credit for doing their duty as far as this, but blame them for their inconsistency in stopping short when their feet are in the way of eternal life. I grant you, that many of our pious people make too great a merit of their religious conferences, attending lectures, and being in *God's* house every sabbath day; and that many of these are not so good as they ought to be. Their piety is without morality, and their zeal without charity. Yet if the institution be good, why should you not conform to it? Do others abuse the thing—this is a strong reason why you should use it *well*. You may be as severe as you please against a parade of religion for selfish views, against all ostentation and hypocrisy. You cannot be more severe than our Master when he addressed hypocrites of his own nation. But how unreasonable is it to refuse instruction calculated to make us wise, because some men, blessed with golden opportunities of improving their minds and manners, all their days remain fools! What a weakness do you manifest when you say—if *they* are made no better, how can *we* expect to be? It is their fault that they resist the divine influence while they bow before the altar of mercy; they inquire of the Lord in his temple, but do not seek with that zeal which is according to knowledge, or indulge the sensibility of the heart which leads to virtue. If you come to the house of the

Lord, and join in divine ordinances, may not you enjoy the pleasures of goodness? It may have a happy effect on your life and conduct, and such impressions may remain on each one's bosom as to make you wise even to salvation. Thus we find that some soils admit seed, and never nourish them; but on other places, tho' you scatter sparingly, yet will the seed grow and flourish and bring forth fruit unto everlasting life.

The objection may be answered by a question of this sort—Do you say that religious people are not made wiser or better by attending public services?—This we allow to be the case with some, but are not others profited by doing it—edified and built up in the faith of the Gospel? If so, why may it not be your happiness? You have the examples of the wise and good who stand at the gates to allure you, or who went into the temple of wisdom after waiting at the door; they now shine in glory among the Saints in light, like pillars in the celestial temple, with *the name of God written upon them.*

Again—There are some with whom we once walked to the house of God in company, but who now forsake the assembling themselves together; the reason offered must give pain to their friends, and is certainly not to their credit. We wish them more virtue than to feel it an excuse, and more wisdom then to make it.

Their reason for neglecting public worship is

that they never get any good by it. They are not more spiritual or heavenly minded than they were many years ago, and do not expect ever to be better.

Perhaps, you would have made less progress in the way to heaven than you have, had you *not* gone to wisdom's gates : you do not suppose, I hope, that you have spent your time to a bad purpose, tho' you have experienced no immediate benefit, and are incapable of recollecting a good sentiment you have heard. Some men are as empty, as they are vain, in their imaginations. The excuse implies a volatile disposition. For if they were serious when they made it, they would lament their own want of thought, and rather blush for the depravity of human passion, than carelessly speak of sacred things, and despise the admonitions of God.

If any make this excuse who are men of grave and sober habits, it would become us to give a reason for the hope we have, that we have not waited in vain, and obviate their objection ; but I have always considered it as an effusion of fancy rather than the sentiment of the heart.

Can you recollect no good effect which the institution has had upon society or the habits of men, whose lives were an evidence that they did more than seem to be religious ? Men who displayed the beauty of virtue in all their actions and were the best citizens of an earthly community, tho' they belonged to the Jerusa-

lem that is above? Will you say that there is no entertainment in the courts of the Lord—or rather that you never experienced any benefit! Read the language of *David*, who felt more music in his soul than ever flowed from his harp—whose sentiments of devotion were expressed in the sweetest strains from soft instruments, or with the majestic sound of the organ. Read the prayer of *Solomon* when he dedicated the temple, and the lessons of wisdom he gave to the children of Men. In them ye have line upon line, and precept upon precept; and such lessons to improve your minds in piety, and regulate your moral conduct, you may hear whenever you attend public worship—and may have reason to bless God hereafter that you received such instruction. You have never felt the divine influence operating upon your minds, but you may have your attention arrested, and your good affections moved, so that you will wonder at your former coldness and indifference! The language of our Master is to this purpose, men ought to pray and not to faint. Behold a greater than *Solomon* thus speaks, and ought not his words to confute such objections, as are now under consideration.—Applied to public worship.—Have you often attended without getting any good? Be more earnest in your desires. Instead of being discouraged, persevere till the service of God is your delight, and you rejoice when your brethren say, come let us go into the house of the Lord.

Again—I have heard some men say that they

employed their time better at home than they could do, by assembling together to hear a minister preach; for they read good books, such as were written by wiser and better men than live in this generation—and get more instruction by reading than hearing. Hence, say they, we have a good excuse for staying at home.

They who make this excuse are not always readers. In such a town as this, how many do you suppose employ their leisure time in reading the works of the learned, or the sentiments of the wise?—to say nothing of pious authors—Is not the excuse made by persons who have no sentiment, and not by those who really wish to improve their minds?—Is it not made by those who tarry at home to sleep, or who prefer every other place to that where God says his honour dwelleth? How many spend their time in walking, in riding, or in such company as makes them merry, rather than wise!

Some there are, without doubt, who are fond of books—but do they consult such as would increase their knowledge; or the vanity of their imaginations? It is to be feared that much precious time is lost, instead of being well improved by reading.

But allowing the objection to be made by those who read the best sermons, or pious discourses of practical divinity, instead of plays and romances, they are wrong in staying at their own houses when they might go to the

house of the Lord, for we ought to hear as well as read. You may be profited by hearing a discourse which is not so excellent in composition; for what is sown in weakness, may be raised in power. The preaching of a sermon, however, is the least important part of public worship. When we pray to God, and praise his name in the congregation, when we meditate upon his law, or muse on the love of Christ, then do we find our souls rising with the subject, and our faith confirmed. We behold the simplicity, if not the majesty of truth in our mode of worshiping, and administering the Ordinances; and have a reason to give for our forms of religion—certainly, where we follow the primitive Church. They met together every Lord's day—like them we read the scriptures—there is decidedly a propriety in doing this as we venerate the sacred writings—and did not some listen to the instruction they hear then, would they not forget the things which concern their well being.

As to the music, it should be grave as well as lively, and such as tunes our hearts to praise and love. This depends upon the taste. Some have no ear and can never tell how “song charms the sense.” They will be likely to say that we can make melody to the Lord without any rules for singing, or a choir to lead the congregation. Most christians are pleased with good singing—and say that you may as well object to the rules of composition in the sermon as in the music—and they may be right;

let all things be done decently and in order. Having observed that the sermon is least essential, I would say that prayer is the most important part of worship. Happy are they who delight in this exercise. It expands the social affections, while it inflames the devout heart, and refines the temper. "Our thoughts, like the waters of the sea when exhaled towards heaven, will lose their offensive bitterness and saltiness, leave behind them each distasteful quality, and sweeten into an amiable candour and humanity, till they descend in gentle showers of love and kindness on our fellow creatures." Are not they blessed who possess such a disposition—and shall not such obtain favour from the Lord?

I have paid attention to the ready excuses people have on their tongues, for neglecting any public observance of the sabbath—but it is proper to mention also, that some people who were very constant in the offices of devotion, have had their minds affected by a change in their condition, and stay at home to ruminate, and so increase the cause of sorrow, when they might experience more than common enjoyment in the house of God. Why art thou cast down, O my Soul, and why art thou disquieted me? hope thou in God! He will give health to the countenance, and gladness to the heart.

People are much to blame if they suffer melancholy sensations to prey upon them. Yet their conduct may not arise from resentment against providence, or mistrust of the divine

goodness, but from a certain lassitude of spirits, a bodily weakness or weariness which causes depression of mind—or else is the consequence when the heart is sick and corroded with *care*. But is not religion a cordial to be taken with the ingredients of the bitter cup—will it not temper the bitterness of your affliction, and make the nauseous draught go down? Cast your care upon God who careth for you. Come, then, ye children of want; or who have been acquainted with adversity, hear instruction and be wise; come, enter the courts of the court of the Lord with the multitude of them that keep holy days, and banish trouble from your mind. What consolation flowed from his lips who spake these words, when the cloud of his affliction was condensing, my peace I leave with you—my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you!

If you would come to the house of the Lord, you would no longer think yourselves cast friendless upon a wide world; and why do you say the men of the world look cold upon you, that you live amidst unfeeling relatives and neighbours; and that even your fellow christians only say, be you warmed and be you filled without that goodness which the friends of humanity ought to possess, much more the disciples of the benevolent Jesus? Perhaps they may not know your situation, which they certainly would be more likely to know did they meet with you oftener;—and perhaps your pride may prevent their offices of kindness. Persons

ashamed of their poverty keep too much at home, and their thoughts are too much confined in their own breasts ; hence they lose those lovely sensibilities which made them happy, and they cannot bear to receive the blessings they once diffused.

This is deviating from our subject, and I shall only address those who complain of providence in a practical sense, and forsake the assembly on the Lord's day, as their manner was once—surely these words have great meaning “ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” If you make his service your delight, God will enable you to rise superior to the joys and sorrows, the frowns and flatteries of this sublunary state.

Need I mention apologies which are sometimes made with propriety ; but oftener by people who do not *love the ways of the Lord*. Such as detention by bad weather, by sickness or particular calls of business—these we say, are made with propriety sometimes ; but few give the cause with sincerity, compared with those who make it serve for an excuse only. Suppose you had business to transact, would you not expose your health in stormy weather, and go into the most bleak parts of the town?—and yet even a cloudy day will prevent—how many! from attending public worship. It does prevent some who are strong men, who are in good health, and may I not add, when their wives, delicate in their constitutions as well as manners, set them a better example. The

daughters of Jerufalem remained with their Lord when his difciples were afraid---and when they could no otherwife foothe his dying agonies, gave him the tribute of their tears. And is it not a truth, uttered by men of fentiment and obfervation, that women fhew more fenfibility in their attachment---and not only fo, but are more firm and conftant in their friendships, than we are who talk of our manly virtues?

I am ready to give all credit to pious women, fome of whom attend public worfhip when it would be more prudent not to expofe their health. But while we praife the zeal and good intentions of fo many; ought we not to obferve that fome are growing negligent and following the fashionable mode of ftaying at home to read *good books*; or they, perhaps, will fay, to attend more minutely to their health, or to their children. Have a care, left while you indulge in things not finful, you may after a while need a little more fleep, and fome folding of the hands.

Next to this indulgence on the Lord's day, may follow amufements, then riding, and the children who in their tender age look to their mothers for advice and example, may put them to the blufh by asking---how the Sabbath is to be *sanctified*? If it be made a fubject of ferious enquiry, whether emergent bufinefs of a worldly nature is not a fufficient reafon for not appearing in the public afsembly?---when you are doing good, ferving your neighbour, or

promoting the general felicity of mankind, our master's precepts and example are before you---profit then by the instructions of your guide.

There is a reason given, and thought to be very substantial, but may do for the country rather than the town, when people say *they do not like their minister*. You are sensible, my brethren, that local attachments and local prejudices are wearing away---and in such a town as this may not hearers of every taste be gratified! Do you prefer one or other form of worship, or mode of baptism, here you can be indulged, whether you be influenced by prejudice, or rational views of scripture. If you think your own minister not found in the faith, or less zealous, or less wise and learned, it is not thought indecorous to leave him. Who is there that will harm you if you plead conscience or convenience? only do not forsake the solemn assembly---go steadily somewhere. Some hearers are pleased with argumentative discourses, and follow a preacher's nice judgment; and others are much delighted with a loose declamatory style and pathetic exclamations, which rouse the feelings rather than inform the understanding. Some prefer plain and simple language as the garb of wisdom---others are not content with a clear luminous manner of writing, but must have in every sermon the richness, the variety, and all the chaste as well as splendid beauties of a good composition. All which cannot be done by one man. But you may have the oracles of wisdom unfolded

and explained in such a way as to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, and while you have so many opportunities to hear, and so many Ministers of religion who care for you, we trust it will not serve for an excuse in this place, that the people neglect public worship because there are no good preachers in the city.

II. We are to describe the temper and conduct of persons who attend public worship, for it is incumbent upon us to listen to the instruction of wisdom. "Blessed are they who wait at her gates, for whoso findeth her shall find life, and obtain favour of the Lord."

If you hear her instruction, ought you not to receive it with meekness, reverence, and attention? Is not this the house of God, is it not the gate of heaven? observe then how you behave, and how you hear---let us all seek the pleasures of the mind, and not offer the sacrifice of fools. The wise understand the truth of religion, but too many whom the fashion of the world draws to the Lord's house, despise religious instruction equally with those who never make their appearance in the assembly.

It is expected that we divest our minds of prejudice; avoid all levity of behaviour; apply the things delivered to ourselves; and suffer them to remain, and operate, as a sentiment of the heart, instead of forgetting what man-

ner of persons we are when we have contemplated our own faces in the mirror.

First.—Be sure to possess a candid disposition, and be free from prejudice, like the noble Bereans, who searched the scriptures and heard the Apostles with pleasure ; not like the citizens of Thessalonica who preferred their own opinions to divine oracles flowing from the lips of men who were inspired by the holy ghost.

We speak of the liberality of the present age, but they who talk the most freely are frequently the most opiniated, and show the least candor. There are, likewise, men wise in their own conceits, who have such a fondness for singularity, as to give not only a peculiar but an unhappy cast to the mind. It is difficult to please such hearers, for if you meet their own ideas of excellence in sentiment, or style, they will soon differ.

There are some remarks made by those who *wish* to be thought critics, which proceed not from ill humour, and it is hardly worth while to mention them seriously, as they are not meant to wound, nor are likely to do it from their *point* or *force*. But when professors of religion say, that We, who preach the gospel, know nothing of it, it becomes us to consider whether they know enough to make up an uncandid and decided opinion against us.

“ Moderation is a lovely child,” and born of

evangelical truth, as well as *polite learning*. Yet zealous people of every sect style a discourse insipid, unscriptural, and sometimes not rational, if you differ from them in your principles of religion.

Have not such called *Tillotson* an Atheist!* In this country, where every man may think freely, and preach what he thinks, even in this land of religious freedom the still voice of reason is often styled *heresy*, and some are so unreasonable that even when we think as they do concerning the doctrines of our holy religion, yet if we are not wrought up to the same degree of passion on the delivery, the mere mechanical operation of the human frame, adapted more to the Theatre than to the Pulpit, will say that we want *zeal*; will call this, not only a want of animation, but a want of the divine influence. Instead of arguing the matter with such people who may be more pious than judicious, let me urge them to listen to the Apostle who says—"let your moderation be known unto all men."

It will be said, without doubt, that our remark applies to the last age, rather than to the present, which is rather an age of indifference than bigotry;—but is there not much bigotry, censoriousness, and party spirit in our christian communities?

It is a melancholy truth that so much indifference prevails, and that the love of many has

* Vide Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical history.

grown cold. It gives pain to every reflecting mind that so many have lost their relish for divine things, to whom the light of the gospel was once sweet and pleasant as a morning without clouds. You who forget God, and yet pretend to be friendly to the cause of virtue, know not what spirit you are of; you are blasting the fairest hopes of human happiness, and destroying the foundation of all morality. This truth, the divine influence on the affairs of men, is the rock upon which all good institutions are framed. Let us all bewail that there is not a more serious attention to the things which belong to our peace; and let the rising generation be taught to respect the institutions of religion—let them be persuaded that there is no honour, nor true enjoyment except the principles of our holy religion, the spirit of wisdom and revelation lie, as the foundation of their whole conduct.

May all classes of people hear the truth with meekness, and receive it into good and honest hearts. My brethren, put on charity. It is a very absurd idea of the gospel, or rather strange opinion of their own charity, which certain men have, who, from giving up the narrow sentiments of their fathers, are now grown so liberal as hardly to know what sentiments they are of, or whether they have any. Is it not very strange that such persons should discover prejudice or bigotry? But what do you call it if this be no prejudice, when you treat with scorn a rational, serious, and evangelical discourse, because you

like another mode of preaching—when you indulge a farcastic humor against the preacher, because he has a dull, ungraceful, old fashioned delivery? Is this the effect of your noble freedom of thinking? Do you blame the worthies of former times, your forefathers, for using a *whip* of cords to persuade them to a *sound* belief; and do you expect to provoke men to your liberality by the tongue of the *scorpion*?

Secondly—The text implies that you have serious views in attending public worship. This is inconsistent with a levity of conduct which some discover whose idle fancies rove, and who suffer vain thoughts to lodge within them.

Is not a grave deportment becoming the house of the Lord? When a man's heart is impressed with the truths of religion, it is a disturbance to him to hear or see others behave amiss—why will any of you interrupt his devotion, or divert his attention? Some of you study a decorum of manners in your commerce with the world, and talk much of the “sweet courtesies of life”—surely then you ought to show your good breeding in every public assembly! When children play, or whisper, or talk loud, we impute it to that vanity which is bound up in the heart of a child.—And let their parents read the wholesome instruction from the lips of the sage. “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.” Some do this whose age is not their excuse, but unfortunately for their honour and

the credit of their parents, are childish in every thing but their years and stature. Too self-willed to be governed at home, and mistaking what constitutes true dignity, their minds are as full of trifles, when they are in a religious assembly, as when they are pursuing those frivolous amusements, which are at all times neglected by people of discretion. Every admonition is lost upon them, nor would they listen to the sound, "though an angel spoke;"—what then are the impressions made by the feeble voice of a common preacher of righteousness! It is like the trace which a ship makes in passing over the surface of the sea, or an arrow through the air.

This head of discourse is meant to be applied to men who have their time of reflection, as well as hours of mirth; they sometimes carry levity upon serious occasions beyond what their reason approves. Let your outward appearance in the house of the Lord be so decent as to allure others to a sense of religion, rather than be an hindrance to their piety. I say the outward appearance, for this is proper to be mentioned, though it is the heart God looks at. The main business is to keep the heart with all diligence if you would be devout and cultivate the friendship of heaven. Yet the external behaviour should be congenial to the spirit within. As much as this is implied when the wise man speaks, "Keep thy foot when thou goest into the house of God and be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they consider not that they do evil."

To bring a censorious spirit is surely worse than a trifling mind. They who seek occasion to find fault with their fellow worshippers, or with a preacher, because he may not captivate by his manner, and treat the subject just as they would choose, show more ill humour, and betray something worse than that vacancy of mind, which others manifest with their trifling airs, or vain parade. But though you are not to indulge the bad passions, yet it is wrong to visit the Lord's house for curiosity's sake, or to gratify your indolence. "Is this the temple of God, or the temple of idleness?" Does it become those who wish to have angels of light and love smile upon them, to sit here in a posture of drowsiness bordering upon insensibility? I know that it is not always the case that people are so dull of hearing as they appear to be. There is a look of indolence some persons have, and it must appear in public assemblies as much as at their own house, where they fold their hands to sleep. Others of active spirits must change their attitudes, and seek for repose when the service continues beyond the usual time, and appear ready to say when will it be over! It is only the old story over again. But can you not be pleased with things except the whole be new? This is a story worth repeating—full of sublime truths, and contains the message which the son of God delivered to men concerning their future happiness. Is not this thought enough to satisfy your souls? Behold the supreme excellencies in glorious harmony—

make the goodness of God the subject to contemplate.

But can we help our wandering thoughts ! how do vain chimeras, strange and unaccountable—how do these fill our minds without our consent ! Vain imaginations are no otherwise sinful than as they are indulged. Do persons think themselves too good even to be the subject of such idle fancies, we doubt their sincerity. It is not to be expected while we are in these bodies that we should have minds thus sublimated and refined.

They who are full of spiritual pride may pretend to have their conversation and hearts *always* in heaven ; but the meek and humble christian laments that his views are so transient. “I implore thy compassion on my infirmities, and in thy mercy impute not to me my wandering thoughts in prayer. For there I must confess my distractions are great and frequent, and I am often least of all in the place where I stand or kneel.”—These words are part of a long discourse on this subject by one who endeavoured to imitate his Lord, and saw as much of heaven as we can do through this vail of flesh.*

As our thoughts are apt to wander, let us use our best endeavours to bring them home, and seek for divine influences to give stability to our feeble minds. Let us set the Lord al-

* Thomas A. Kempis.

ways before us, or make it the predominant wish of our soul to please him.

Thirdly. That we may become acquainted with the human heart, and understand our errors, let us apply the subject of the discourse more to ourselves, than our neighbours.

Our Lord uses this language, *take heed how you hear* ; and few things are repeated by any preacher of moral virtue, which do not contain lessons for our own conduct : yet many who seem to be religious, suppose others deserve reproof, and themselves only instruction in righteousness, or else are too wise to be taught. This they manifest by never taking things to themselves, which would be profitable for their correction ; but what saith the Apostle?—*Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but let him think soberly according to the measure of his faith.*

It is commonly said that people rather prefer sermons upon faith, than morality, because they do not relish particular applications, but are willing to acknowledge the depravity of human nature, which serves to cover their own faults. Many are of the opinion, however, that a pointed declamation against vitious unruly characters is not only the most useful kind of preaching, but as pleasing to the auditory. It may be to several classes of people, and some of you look around, perhaps, and see those who ought to feel the reproof home to the con-

science. But had you not better think and say, "Lord is it I?"—By this we do not imagine that admonitions should come alike to all, as though there was no distinction of character, or personal excellency. There is a great difference, whatever you may think of human depravity, between the man who *sighs that he has lost a day*, and the man who never spent his time to any good purpose, or gave a cup of water to a child of sorrow. Can we suppose that he will feel the application, when the preacher declares against intemperance, who keeps the mastery over his passions. If a man is profuse in his expences, will his feelings be hurt by a reproof against covetousness?

Even when we touch the predominant passion, it is not always the case that we make the subjects of it feel. How often have you known a preacher gain commendation by painting vice in all its deformity, describing the evil of injustice; the contracted spirit of the miser who craves for the necessaries of life while he rolls in plenty; the rich fool who says, soul, take thine ease, forgetting there is a time to die; or setting forth the bad consequences of drinking to excess; or the turpitude of their actions who are the slaves of lust—these things may be reiterated from the pulpit, and the preacher be applauded by the very persons whom they mostly concern. It may be the case, but is it not a rare instance? *that an individual thinks a dart thrown at his breast*; if his resentment be excited, it is only when his folly is glaring, and

he conjectures that the bow was not bent at a venture. In most cases the fault is shifted from your own character, and you look at something less *than a beam* in your neighbour's eye. In a sermon against pride, who sees himself to be the proud man?—And do you think your own children have any vanity? When we say, who can stand before envy? do you think we point a moral for your instruction—your particular attention? Or is it to show the odious qualities of some, in the line of your acquaintance, and you *thank* God for not being *as they are*? No discourses are more popular than those designed to expose the wickedness of slander, detraction, and the free use of the tongue. How apt are men, and sometimes *women*, to join their opinion with the preacher's, and not only speak against the vice, but against their neighbours who go from house to house *like busy bodies*;—yet in the words they utter there may be something, if not *the poison of asps*, like to wormwood and gall. Are they pure in speech, from all mixture of satire and censoriousness?

Not to enlarge, let us apply things properly; to be sure, let us not take pleasure that others are reprov'd, and we ourselves escape observation. When we see any made unhappy—our fellow beings who having run to those excesses in vice which deserve every reproof from the preachers of morality, and the friends of virtue, yet *are not past feeling*—oh let us mingle sensations of pity for *them*, while we study our own dispositions! why should we justify our-

selves? there is folly and perverseness enough in us all to make us humble: Let us endeavour to understand those scriptures which are profitable for our reproof, correction and instruction in Righteousness. If we grow in grace and increase in the knowledge of Christ, we shall then understand the things which belong to our peace.

Whilst we wait at the posts of wisdom's door, let the truths of religion sink deeply in our breasts, become the subjects of our future meditation, and influence our thoughts and actions. This is the last thing proposed in the method of our discourse.

Fourthly—Truth is a jewel of inestimable value. By manifestation of it we ought to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. The means of holiness are easily discovered, and being well understood have a tendency to advance men to the perfection of moral agents and sincere christians. Do you receive any entertainment in the courts of the Lord, and does not your heart beat with virtuous solicitude that you may know and do the will of God? O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Thus speaks the devout Psalmist, and what rich pleasures of the mind did he enjoy when he said—How I love thy law, it is my meditation all the day! he says further, Thy word have I hid in my heart that I may not sin against thee. I have said, I will keep thy words.

Recollect whether you have not formed some such resolutions, and cultivate the disposition, those heavenly affections, till you abide in the doctrine of Christ. Do you understand the nature of the service required of you, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly that you may praise him with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and being in the spirit on the Lord's day, may you every other day walk before *the Lord in the land of the living*. They will call you hypocrites if your religion be not intimately connected with the ordinary duties of life; if like the best garment you set it aside after you exhibit yourselves to the view of the public assembly. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

If we go from the house of the Lord with a disposition to serve him, this shows the tendency and proper influence of religious institutions. Alas! that our virtuous resolutions are of so short continuance! why do we not encourage every emotion of the heart when it is melted with love? If we indulge our best affections will they not become principles of action? By renewing those resolutions which spring from virtuous sentiments, you will preserve them in undecayed vigour, and you may allure others who see your good works to the love of wisdom, and practice of virtue. The men of the world will no longer speak evil of you, comparing you to falling stars and blazing meteors; but as they behold the pure and mild rays, which have illuminated your paths, they will desire

to walk in the glow and steadiness of that light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

What we have said implies that the truths of religion should abide on our minds, and that we adorn the doctrines of Jesus in our whole life and conversation. There may be a secret influence of the *word*, where you cannot repeat distinctly, or perhaps recollect the things you have heard. The reason for this observation is, that people of weak minds are apt to be discouraged, because they cannot tell what has been delivered, yet they may not be the forgetful hearers in a practical sense, like others who can relate whole passages out of books that they read, or sermons they hear, without being made wiser or better for their knowledge. There is nothing more absurd than a *cant* phrase in very common use, *gifted in the scriptures*, or *gifted in prayer*, by which is meant a peculiar influence of the holy ghost: and hence many vain professors of our religion think themselves holier than their neighbours, who are more modest than themselves, more wise according to the excellent spirit they possess. It is no way necessary to the character of a christian to have strong natural powers—such a strong memory and brilliant fancy, that he need only give a little attention to what he hears, and be able to repeat a great deal. Some who have excellent memories have a weak understanding, and may not treasure up in their minds the *best* things—and we well know that the judgment may be

good and the memory be weak ; and that many well disposed people have neither judgment nor memory. But allowing this, yet ought not they who attend public worship to recollect the subjects they hear as well as other things upon which they employ their minds? Shall the truths of religion have less effect upon you than the story of yesterday, or a dream of the night? can you recollect every thing you see, and retain nothing you hear? can you tell the dress of your acquaintance, and whether a new fashion be introduced, and has every religious sentiment escaped from your memory? There appears to me nothing in which we mistake more than in our opinion of this faculty. The memory depends very much upon the mental associations, and may be increased if we dwell upon these, or fix our attention upon the objects of thought. Thus a memory may be strong when a person arrives at the age of manly sentiment, which was weak in his puerile years ; and many a child, quick in his conceptions, and wonderful for a memory, has wanted strength of mind, and never made those improvements which were expected. The bud of genius may blossom and yield no fruit : many remember words, and know nothing of things. Are there not some men of substantial powers, who recollect ideas, and combine things in their minds, when words entirely escape them—and shew more strength of memory than the idle chatterer, who can tell in the same words almost every thing he hears, and who runs on without ideas? If you attend diligently then

to the word of God, you will retain much of it in your minds, and may call serious truths up to view on certain occasions, so as to be convinced they were not wholly lost, though at first they did not *meet your recollection*. And as often as we go to the house of the Lord, is there not something said that is worthy to be remembered? Let it remain, and hereafter, whatever the present sensation may be, it shall edify and console you.

I conclude with saying that every minister is made happy by seeing the people manifest that *his preaching is not in vain*.

The ministers of this town would be ungrateful, were they insensible of the respect and polite treatment they receive from persons of every class and every age: but what must be their sensations if they are witnesses of a growing neglect of the institutions of christianity, and to an indifference to all religion! Should it become still more fashionable *not* to assemble on the Lord's day, or but one part of it; to spend the time of *sacred rest* in vain amusements, will not our usefulness be at an end? What will it signify that every public oration, and every public paper, tell of the enlightened clergy of this country, and how patriotic their exertions have been, when the multitude no longer meet to keep the day holy to the Lord!

In all places there are individuals who say hard things against religion, and try to make the *clerical character* contemptible. And do

not men of dissipation and loose morals, in the most unqualified manner, charge all grave and sober persons with hypocrisy? For this the clergy of New-England have frequently been the "song of the drunkard," and "grimacing ridicule" may still aim at something that is "*meant for a jest.*"

We need not regard the reflections made upon us by such kind of adversaries, more weak than wicked, as politicians. Do they not, when rolling in their vices, prefer the reign of *chaos and old night*, to order and happiness; and *no* religion, to that life and immortality which the gospel has revealed? Are they not as much the sowers of sedition in the Commonwealth, as of infidelity in the churches? are they not as much without *system* as without CONSCIENCE?

But how much have the friends of virtue to dread from cold indifference and inattention to the services of religion? In what manner will God visit a nation whom he has employed in executing the noblest purposes of heaven on this earthly stage!

Cultivate the spirit of religion in your hearts, and bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and you will have that pleasure which arises from seeing them walk in the truth.

Then from being the best members of society here on earth, you will be fitted for the company of angels; in the same bright abodes you will learn their notes of praise; and forever celebrate the divine goodness in songs of joy, and hymns of love.



7 NO 67

5-

